

## **Being Queer In A Town That Doesn't Ask Questions**

*By Emily Pratt Slatin*

There's a silence in rural Vermont that most people don't talk about. It's not the kind you hear in the woods at dusk, not the stillness between pine trees, or the hush that settles on an unplowed road during the first snow. No, this silence is social—heavy, old, and worn like a flannel shirt that's never fit quite right. It's the kind of silence that nods at you politely in the post office but never looks past the surface.

I live with my wife in Middletown Springs, population not-quite-800. It's the kind of town where the general store has a community bulletin board on the front porch, along with two rocking chairs. The store carries almost everything I need at a moment's notice; things like toilet paper, local eggs, or a small pile of old church cookbooks for sale by donation.

People know me as Emily here in town, and my truck is known by the firefighter decal on the back window. Everyone, whether they admit it or not, knows everyone else—and likely what car they drive. But knowing someone here is often a matter of routine, not intimacy. They know your vehicle, have probably pet your dog, read your posts on Front Porch Forum, and noticed how well you plow your driveway. What they don't ask about is your pronouns, your marriage, your orientation, your past, your pain, or what it took to get here.

Doctors assigned me female at birth because of my XX chromosomes. I was born intersex, was raised as a girl, and identified as female my entire life. I came out as a lesbian when I was 16 years old—to my parents, my friends, my family, and even my dog. I don't avoid that truth, and I never have. I've lived as a queer, strong-willed woman, not in protest or rebellion, but because that's simply who I am. But in a town like this, being visibly queer often means walking through a society where people are conditioned to see you clearly—and choose not to speak. And if I'm being honest, I'm not always sure whether that silence is kindness, or cowardice.

When I moved here in 2020 with my girlfriend (now wife), I braced for a reaction that never came. No one glared. No one made a scene. But no one said, "Welcome," either—not in the way I hoped. It was all tight smiles and noncommittal head tilts, like people were trying to square the version of womanhood they'd built in their minds with the tall, tattooed, career fire lieutenant lesbian working her tractor in hiking boots and pure blue nail polish.

My neighbors are the kind of people everyone dreams of having, and over the years, we've formed a friendship. I remember meeting Kathy, the postmaster, and attending my first community gathering at Mineral Springs Park, where I was the new girl in town. I became loosely associated with the community—accepted and supported, but not necessarily folded in. In some ways, I was grateful. I didn't come here for approval; I came anticipating the hard work of owning a retired dairy farm, the winters, mud season, and the slower pace of life. And Vermont gave me that. Or maybe it just looked away.

Pride, for most people, gets packaged up in the month of June—rainbow flags, city parades, hashtags, and slogans. But in places like this, Pride is quieter. It's waking up, pulling on your boots, and living your truth in full daylight. It's being visible without permission. It's kissing Amelia in the driveway, and not checking who's watching.

It's also loneliness. Let's not pretend it isn't. There's a particular ache to being the only openly queer person you know in your zip code besides your spouse. Outside of the larger cities, there are no queer potlucks here. No gay hangouts. No little signs in coffee shop windows. Sometimes I wonder if I'm the town's unofficial Pride parade—just me and my boots and my refusal to flinch.

I've stopped waiting for people to ask about my story. They won't. And maybe that's their way of giving me space. Or maybe they're afraid that if they ask, I'll actually tell them—and then they'll have to think about it for a while.

**Emily Pratt Slatin (she/her)** is a writer and photographer, living with her wife on a retired dairy farm in Middletown Springs, Vermont. Her work can be found at [RescueGirl557.com](http://RescueGirl557.com).